

By: Hughes

H.B. No. 4119

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to investigations of and procedures for reports of child abuse and neglect.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Section 261.002, Family Code, is amended by amending Subsection (b) and adding Subsections (d) and (e) to read as follows:

(b) The department may adopt rules necessary to carry out this section. The rules shall provide for:

(1) procedural protections for individuals reported to have committed abuse or neglect;

(2) cooperation with local child service agencies, including hospitals, clinics, and schools;~~[7]~~ and

(3) cooperation with other states in exchanging reports to effect a national registration system.

(d) Before the department may add to the central registry a record of a reported case of child abuse or neglect, the department must provide to the individual reported to have committed the abuse or neglect:

(1) written notice that information regarding the reported case will be added to the registry;

(2) a copy of the record that will be added to the registry; and

(3) the opportunity to appeal the department's finding

1 of abuse or neglect as provided by Subsection (e).

2 (e) An individual described by Subsection (d) may appeal the
3 department's finding of abuse or neglect by requesting a hearing
4 conducted by the State Office of Administrative Hearings. An
5 appeal under this subsection is a contested case under Chapter
6 2001, Government Code. The department may not include in the
7 central registry a record of a reported case of child abuse or
8 neglect if the department's finding of abuse or neglect is not
9 sustained by an administrative law judge following a hearing under
10 this section.

11 SECTION 2. Section 261.103, Family Code, is amended by
12 adding Subsection (d) to read as follows:

13 (d) The department or other entity shall maintain each
14 report until the second anniversary of the date the department or
15 other entity receives the report.

16 SECTION 3. Sections 261.201(b) and (c), Family Code, are
17 amended to read as follows:

18 (b) A court shall [~~may~~] order the disclosure of information
19 that is confidential under this section if:

20 (1) a motion has been filed with the court requesting
21 the release of the information;

22 (2) a notice of hearing has been served on the
23 investigating agency and all other interested parties; and

24 (3) after hearing and an in camera review of the
25 requested information, the court determines that the disclosure of
26 the requested information is[+]

27 [~~(A) essential to the administration of justice,~~

1 ~~and~~

2 ~~[(B)]~~ not likely to endanger the life or safety
3 of:

4 (A) ~~[(i)]~~ a child who is the subject of the
5 report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect;

6 (B) ~~[(ii)]~~ a person who makes a report of
7 alleged or suspected abuse or neglect; or

8 (C) ~~[(iii)]~~ any other person who participates
9 in an investigation of reported abuse or neglect or who provides
10 care for the child.

11 (c) In addition to Subsection (b), a court, on its own
12 motion, may order disclosure of information that is confidential
13 under this section if:

14 (1) the order is rendered at a hearing for which all
15 parties have been given notice;

16 (2) the court finds that disclosure of the information
17 is~~+~~

18 ~~[(A) essential to the administration of justice,~~

19 ~~and~~

20 ~~[(B)]~~ not likely to endanger the life or safety
21 of:

22 (A) ~~[(i)]~~ a child who is the subject of the
23 report of alleged or suspected abuse or neglect;

24 (B) ~~[(ii)]~~ a person who makes a report of
25 alleged or suspected abuse or neglect; or

26 (C) ~~[(iii)]~~ any other person who participates
27 in an investigation of reported abuse or neglect or who provides

1 care for the child; and

2 (3) the order is reduced to writing or made on the
3 record in open court.

4 SECTION 4. Section 261.302, Family Code, is amended by
5 amending Subsections (a) and (f) and adding Subsections (e-1),
6 (e-2), and (e-3) to read as follows:

7 (a) The investigation may include:

8 (1) a visit to the child's home, unless the alleged
9 abuse or neglect can be confirmed or clearly ruled out without a
10 home visit; and

11 (2) an interview with and examination of the subject
12 child, another child in the home, or the child's parents, which may
13 include a medical, psychological, or psychiatric examination as
14 authorized by Subsection (e-1).

15 (e-1) Except as provided by Subsection (e-2), an
16 investigation that includes an examination of the subject child or
17 another child in the home may not include a medical, psychological,
18 or psychiatric examination of the child unless:

19 (1) the child's parent, conservator, or legal guardian
20 consents in writing to the examination; or

21 (2) the department obtains a court order for the
22 medical, psychological, or psychiatric examination.

23 (e-2) If during the investigation a department investigator
24 believes that a child needs emergency medical attention before a
25 representative of a law enforcement agency is able to arrive, the
26 investigator may obtain medical assistance for the child from
27 emergency medical services personnel, as defined by Section

1 773.003, Health and Safety Code.

2 (e-3) This section does not limit the authority of a law
3 enforcement agency to perform its duties under any other law.

4 (f) A person commits an offense if the person is notified of
5 the time of the transport of a child by the department and the
6 location from which the transport is initiated and the person is
7 present at the location when the transport is initiated and
8 attempts to interfere with the department's investigation. An
9 offense under this subsection is a Class B misdemeanor. It is an
10 exception to the application of this subsection that the department
11 requested the person to be present at the site of the transport.
12 This subsection applies only when:

13 (1) the department has taken possession of a child
14 under Section 262.104 or is conducting an ongoing court-ordered
15 investigation; or

16 (2) the child's parent, conservator, or legal guardian
17 has consented to the transport.

18 SECTION 5. Section 261.3021, Family Code, is amended to
19 read as follows:

20 Sec. 261.3021. CASEWORK DOCUMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT. (a)
21 Subject to the appropriation of money for these purposes, the
22 department shall:

23 (1) identify critical investigation actions that
24 impact child safety and require department caseworkers to document
25 those actions in a child's case file not later than the day after
26 the action occurs;

27 (2) identify and develop a comprehensive set of

1 casework quality indicators that must be reported in real time to
2 support timely management oversight;

3 (3) provide department supervisors with access to
4 casework quality indicators and train department supervisors on the
5 use of that information in the daily supervision of caseworkers;

6 (4) develop a case tracking system that notifies
7 department supervisors and management when a case is not
8 progressing in a timely manner;

9 (5) use current data reporting systems to provide
10 department supervisors and management with easier access to
11 information; and

12 (6) train department supervisors and management on the
13 use of data to monitor cases and make decisions.

14 (b) The department shall make a record of each interview
15 conducted in an investigation of a report of abuse or neglect and
16 shall maintain those records and all other documents, including
17 original notes, relating to the investigation.

18 SECTION 6. Section [261.307\(a\)](#), Family Code, is amended to
19 read as follows:

20 (a) As soon as possible after initiating an investigation of
21 a parent or other person having legal custody of a child, the
22 department shall provide to the person:

23 (1) a summary that:

24 (A) is brief and easily understood;

25 (B) is written in a language that the person
26 understands, or if the person is illiterate, is read to the person
27 in a language that the person understands; and

1 (C) contains the following information:

2 (i) the department's procedures for
3 conducting an investigation of alleged child abuse or neglect,
4 including:

5 (a) a description of the
6 circumstances under which the department would request to remove
7 the child from the home through the judicial system; and

8 (b) an explanation that the law
9 requires the department to refer all reports of alleged child abuse
10 or neglect to a law enforcement agency for a separate determination
11 of whether a criminal violation occurred;

12 (ii) the person's right to file a complaint
13 with the department or to request a review of the findings made by
14 the department in the investigation;

15 (iii) the person's right to review all
16 records of the investigation unless the review would jeopardize an
17 ongoing criminal investigation or the child's safety;

18 (iv) the person's right to seek legal
19 counsel;

20 (v) references to the statutory and
21 regulatory provisions governing child abuse and neglect and how the
22 person may obtain copies of those provisions; ~~and~~

23 (vi) the process the person may use to
24 acquire access to the child if the child is removed from the home;
25 and

26 (vii) a list of the specific allegations
27 being investigated, including the date and a detailed description

1 of each allegation;

2 (2) if the department determines that removal of the
3 child may be warranted, a proposed child placement resources form
4 that:

5 (A) instructs the parent or other person having
6 legal custody of the child to:

7 (i) complete and return the form to the
8 department or agency; and

9 (ii) identify in the form three individuals
10 who reside in this state within 100 miles of the child's primary
11 residence and who could serve as [be] relative caregivers or
12 designated caregivers, as those terms are defined by Section
13 264.751, before a suit affecting the parent-child relationship is
14 filed and until the suit is dismissed; and

15 (B) informs the parent or other person of a
16 location that is available to the parent or other person to submit
17 the information in the form 24 hours a day either in person or by
18 facsimile machine or e-mail; and

19 (3) an informational manual required by Section
20 261.3071.

21 SECTION 7. Section 261.309, Family Code, is amended by
22 adding Subsections (b-1), (c-1), (c-2), and (e-1) and amending
23 Subsections (c) and (d) to read as follows:

24 (b-1) At the conclusion of the informal review under
25 Subsection (b), the immediate supervisor shall submit a summary of
26 the person's case or complaint and the supervisor's findings
27 relating to the person's case or complaint. Not later than the 20th

1 day after the date the supervisor submits the summary and findings,
2 the department shall make the written summary and findings
3 available to the person under investigation.

4 (c) If, after the department's investigation, the person
5 who is alleged to have abused or neglected a child disputes the
6 department's determination of whether child abuse or neglect
7 occurred, the person may request an administrative review of the
8 findings. The department shall provide a copy of the file relating
9 to the investigation to the person who requests the review not later
10 than the 30th day before the date of the review. A department
11 employee in administration who was not involved in or did not
12 directly supervise the investigation shall conduct the review. The
13 review must sustain, alter, or reverse the department's original
14 findings in the investigation.

15 (c-1) At the administrative review prescribed by Subsection
16 (c), the person conducting the review for the department shall
17 allow the person challenging the findings to bring witnesses,
18 submit evidence, and question the investigative workers and
19 immediate supervisors who developed the department's findings. The
20 department may postpone the administrative review for not more than
21 30 days to ensure attendance of witnesses, necessary investigative
22 workers, and immediate supervisors.

23 (c-2) The department shall make an audio recording of the
24 administrative review prescribed by Subsection (c) and preserve the
25 recording until the first anniversary of the date the
26 administrative review concludes. The department shall make the
27 audio recording available to any party involved in the review not

1 later than the 10th day after the date the person requests access to
2 the recording.

3 (d) Unless a civil or criminal court proceeding or an
4 ongoing criminal investigation relating to the alleged abuse or
5 neglect investigated by the department is pending, the department
6 employee shall conduct the administrative review prescribed by
7 Subsection (c) as soon as possible but not later than the 45th day
8 after the date the department receives the request. If a civil
9 court proceeding initiated by the department, a [or] criminal court
10 proceeding, or an ongoing criminal investigation is pending, the
11 department may postpone the review until the court proceeding is
12 completed. The department shall conduct the review not later than
13 the 45th day after the date the court proceeding or investigation is
14 completed.

15 (e-1) A person under investigation for allegedly abusing or
16 neglecting the person's child is not subject to, and may not be
17 required to submit to, the jurisdiction of the State Office of
18 Administrative Hearings in any proceeding in connection to the
19 alleged abuse or neglect.

20 SECTION 8. Section 261.310(d), Family Code, is amended to
21 read as follows:

22 (d) The standards shall:

23 (1) recommend that videotaped and audiotaped
24 interviews be uninterrupted;

25 (2) recommend a maximum number of interviews with and
26 examinations of a suspected victim;

27 (3) provide procedures to preserve evidence,

1 including the original audio recordings of the intake telephone
2 calls, original notes, e-mails, videotapes, and other recordings or
3 audiotapes, until the second anniversary of the later of the date
4 the evidence is created or the date of a final judgment in a
5 reported case for which the evidence is created [~~for one year~~]; and

6 (4) provide that an investigator of suspected child
7 abuse or neglect make a reasonable effort to locate and inform each
8 parent of a child of any report of abuse or neglect relating to the
9 child.

10 SECTION 9. Section 261.302(c), Family Code, is repealed.

11 SECTION 10. The changes in law made by this Act apply only
12 to an investigation of a report of child abuse or neglect that is
13 made, or a suit affecting the parent-child relationship that is
14 commenced, on or after the effective date of this Act. A report
15 that is made or a suit that is commenced before the effective date
16 of this Act is governed by the law in effect on the date the report
17 was made or the suit was commenced, and the former law is continued
18 in effect for that purpose.

19 SECTION 11. This Act takes effect September 1, 2015.